

WILLEM and DINA GEURINK

“Two people never to forget”

*“We lay in the deep water.
They have pulled us out of it,
While we couldn’t swim”.*

Jonny Levy

**Written by:
Mr. Henny Bennink**

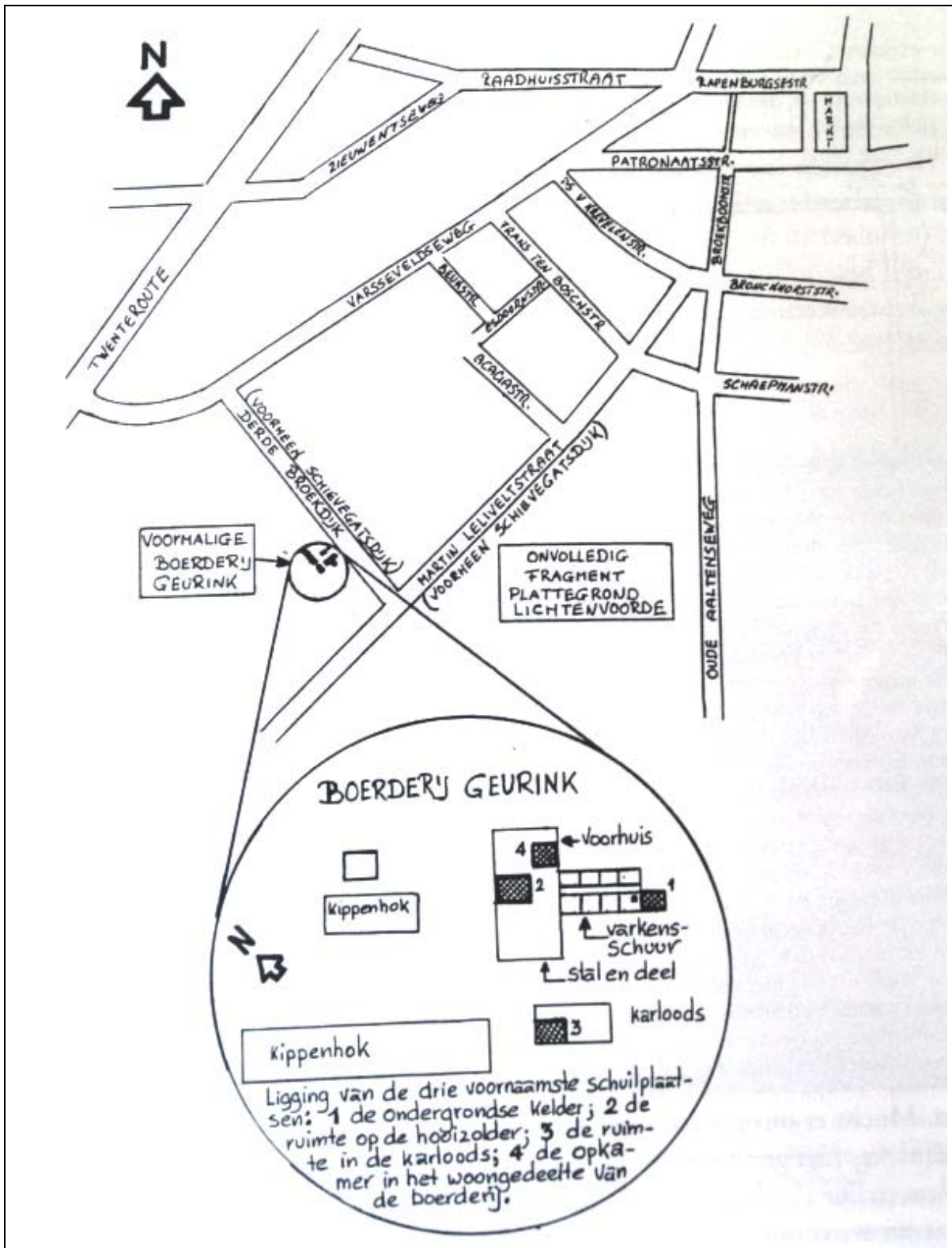
Translation by:
Albert Geurink, their 6th child, born in 1946

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INTRODUCTION

Nothing happens without a reason; everything has a cause. A good illustration for this thesis is the origin in wartime of hiding places for “onderduikers” [*which means “hiding people” or those who “dive underground”]. Many of the inhabitants of the municipality of Lichtenvoorde, which is in the eastern part of the province of Gelderland, in the Netherlands, did a lot for their fellow man during World War II [*1940-1945]. [*Lichtenvoorde is located about 10 miles from the Dutch-German border]. Many times they risked their own lives or put their own families in harms way, but typically most remained very modest in telling their story of what they did during this horrible war and many felt it was a very common undertaking and even quite self-evident, thus many never thought to share their experiences with others.

This image of sincere willingness to help and also the modesty shared by many is also fitting of Willem Geurink (1912-1997) and his wife, Dina (Wisselink) Geurink (1913-2000). During this time they were living on a farm in the “Derde Broekdijk” [*literally means “Third Low Lands-Dyke”] in the town of Lichtenvoorde. [*See the following map].



Translations:

a. in the two drawn blocks:

- VOORMALIGE BOERDERIJ GEURINK = FORMER FARM OF THE GEURINKS

- ONVOLLEDIGE PLATTEGROND LICHTENVOORDE = INCOMPLETE MAP OF (*THE SOUTH PART OF THE TOWN OF) LICHTENVOORDE

[*Note Albert G.: the MARTIN LELIVELTSTRAAT (*MARTIN LELIVELT STREET) was renamed on May 5, 2009, to the WILLEM (AND DINA) GEURINKSTRAAT].

b. In the big circle:

- **BOERDERIJ GEURINK = GEURINK FARM**
- **kippenhok = chicken barn**
- **voorhuis = front part of the farm [*where the Geurink Family lived]**
- **varkensschuur = pigsty**
- **stal en deel = cowshed [*also for their horse] and open part in this barn**
- **karloods - wagon barn**

And:

- **Ligging van de drie voornaamste schuilplaatsen: 1 de ondergrondse kelder; 2 de ruimte op de hooizolder op de hooizolder 3 de ruimte in de karloods; 4 de opkamer in de woongedeelte van de boerderij.**

Translation:

- **Location of the three [*must be four!] most important hiding-places: 1. the underground cellar [*note A.G.: ment for the three jewish boys and sometimes also their parents and Bas Berger); 2. the (*hiding) place on the hay attic; 3 the place in the wagon barn; 4. a sleeping room in hte front living part of the farm.**

Note: There were 2 more hiding-places: 5. on the attic of the pigsty (at the end of the pigsty, just above the entrance of the underground cellar number 1). and 6, a small hiding-place at the end of the stairs to the attic of the front part of the farm, just under the wooden attic floor, for cases of direct emergency.

In and around their farm, hiding places were constructed. There was one in the hay in the attic, one between the bundle of sticks and iron in the cart shed and one special, outside hiding cellar behind the pig barn. Located about 16 inches under the ground, this special cellar was only approachable from the inside, by way of the pig barn. You will become better acquainted with these various hiding places as the story continues.

No one would have ever heard anything about the activities of Willem and Dina Geurink had it not been for Jan Scholte [*Note A.G.: a member of the Historical Society of Lichtenvoorde and a family friend]. Jan brought out the existence of the hiding cellars to the public. In 1997, Willem and Dina were approaching old age and their health was declining. When Jan Scholte heard that Willem and Dina were planning to exchange their farm for a "senior residence" in the center of the town of Lichtenvoorde [*A.G.: the town and the municipality of Lichtenvoorde have the same name], Jan presented us [*members of the Historical Society in Lichtenvoorde] with local daily and weekly newspaper releases about the existence of a number of unique hiding places in and around the Geurink farm. He was concerned because plans called for the demolition of the farm. Jan guided groups of school students to view these hiding places on the farm. He talked mainly about the origin of the three hiding places which provided "secure hiding" for three to four young people at night, during the war. These "secure places" were not evident to the public under most circumstances. It was his sincere desire to save the farm and the "hiding places" for posterity by turning the farm buildings into a museum.

On March 20th, 1997, Jan Scholte mailed the board of the Society for Archaeology of Lichtenvoorde a note, in which he asked the board to do their best to save the farm. At the same time, he proposed to make a museum of the farm, with a special emphasis on the three hiding places. This letter was dealt with on May 14th, 1997, at the board meeting, in company of the writer [*Mr. Bennink]. The board decided to appoint a committee to look into the matter and study what the possibilities were for the conservation of the farm.

The committee had several meetings with, among others, the Mayor and Eldermen, the Geurink family and the "Gelders Oudheidkundig Contact" [*A.G.: literally "the Gelderland, Archaeological Contact"]. Instead of sympathy for this project, the whole idea failed. Reasons: the short time of negotiations, the eccentric location of the farm near the centre of Lichtenvoorde and the lack of finances which would cause a huge debt for the organization.

[*Note A.G.: On December 3, 2004, a similar museum, under the name “Markt 12”, was opened in the neighboring town of Aalten. An empty house in the central market of Aalten, also has a former WW II hiding place in the attic, and was renovated to be a so called “Underground Diving Museum”. More about this new and interesting museum is to find on the website www.markt12museum.nl].

Jan Scholte regularly ended his story with an “Ode to Willem and Dina Geurink – Two simple people who under danger of their own lives dared to take in some “underground divers” on their farm with courage, perseverance, piety and a solid trust in a good ending of that very unpleasant time and to save them from a certain death”. But before telling more about this, first some of the causes from the period 1940-1945 which preceded the beginning of this story.

MEASURES OF THE [*GERMAN] OCCUPIER

Not long after the Nazis occupied our country in May of 1940, it became rather quickly evident what their real intentions were. Their promise of keeping the structure of the Dutch intact as much as possible did not materialize. Very systematically, the leaders of Nazi Germany issued a lot of commands, rules and prohibitions. With mainly one goal: to make the lives of the Jews in our country impossible. On August 20th, 1940, the “rijkscommissaris” [*the “Empire Commissioner” literally], named Seys-Inquart, (one of Hitler’s aides, born in Austria), declared that if it was really necessary, he would be allowed, in some cases, to dismiss Jewish functionaries. This order already contained, in spite of many reassuring words, the cold undertones of repression which caused many observant people to suspect the worst. Eight days after that first order, a second order followed. This order stated that no new jobs would be available to Jewish people in the bureaucracy and that present Jewish functionaries would not be promoted to a higher rank.

Two months later, again – the pressure on the Jews was increased more and more – every Dutch functionary had to sanction with his signature that he was not of Jewish origin and not related to them. Although there was, here and there, some resistance among the non-Jews, mainly people in Scientific Education, against this absolutely random measure, most of the functionaries signed when the papers were handed to them. Just what the eventuality of this measure would cause for their Jewish colleagues, many a man shrugged his shoulders.

The next radical measure was the substitution of special Jewish schools. Jewish children and students were no longer allowed to attend existing schools. If that wasn’t enough, the Jews had to give their cars, bikes, radios and even their domestic animals to the ‘Befehlshaber’ [*A.G.: a German word meaning “Commander”]. Besides that the parks, swimming pools and many other public places became restricted areas for them.

The most far-reaching measure was that of January 31st, 1941. That day the order was implemented that all people who were either whole or partly Jewish blood had to report for registration before February 21st, 1941. The majority of the Jews obeyed this order. [*A.G.: At the same time, all the other Dutchmen were obliged to get a personal I.D. card, which was called a “P.B.” card, from the Dutch word “Persoons-Bewijs”, but without the red letter “J”, like the Jews had on their cards]. With this the German occupier was able to get an accurate list of Jews in a rather short time. This list noted how many Jews lived in the Netherlands and where they lived. In the beginning of July of 1942, with the help of these lists, the first Jews were summoned, so called to be employed somewhere in foreign parts. On July 15th, 1942, they were transported by train from Westerbork to Auschwitz. [*Note A.G.: The municipality of Westerbork had a German used concentration camp for the captured Dutch Jews and Gypsies. This camp was hidden from “too curious eyes” in thinly populated moors and woods in Westerbork, in the Dutch province of Drente. This was the last station before their final transport. This camp was started before the Germans conquered the Netherlands in May of 1940. Years before this same camp was erected by the Dutch government and used for collecting the Jewish fugitives who had illegally crossed over the Dutch border]. The unsuspecting Jews, who stepped on the train at Westerbork camp, were gassed immediately upon arrival at Auschwitz. Even the most intelligent minds of that time were not “in the know”, although many just wondered where all the deported Jews stayed but no one knew where, and they also wondered why none ever returned. The German leaders certainly gave no indication or sign of what was to happen.

The story of Jonny Levy, one of the three Jewish “onderduikers”, who lived almost two years in the “hiding cellar” on the Geurink family, begins at this point. His story is very typical.

To begin the chronological events of Jonny Levy – we will know him later in more details – born on August 7th, 1923, had an acquaintance in his hometown of Varsseveld [*A.G.: 5 miles west of Lichtenvoorde], named Wim Janssen (this is a fictitious name). Janssen, a bold person who by nature had a strong feeling for adventure, enlisted in the German Army. He was with the special [*Waffen]-SS, a section [*of the German Army] that did not pay much attention to the rules [*of the Geneva Convention] that were supposed to be followed in wartime.

The section to which Janssen belonged was engaged in fighting on the eastern front [*in Russia]. With the merciless battles of the Germans in Poland, obviously his eyes were opened. He remembered distinctly that shortly after the fights he was engaged in, the Jews were captured by the occupying troops and removed with trucks. To where? Nobody could give Janssen an answer to this question. That made him think.

For a few days, prior to Christmas 1941, Janssen was on leave. He spent this time with his parents in Varsseveld. The residents of Vasseveld did not like him very much; openly they turned their backs to him. That was for the SSer no reason to hate his fellow townsmen. On the contrary! On Christmas Eve 1941, Janssen met Jonny Levy [*A.G.: when he visited the Levy home]. With mixed feelings the boys exchanged some words. Before they said good-bye to one another, Janssen looked empathically at Levy. He told Jonny what he had seen in Poland and what happened to the Jews after the occupation of that country [*In the beginning of September 1939]. The SSer warned Jonny that under no circumstances should he go to Germany voluntarily, no matter what would happen. What precisely happened with the Jews, he could not as yet tell Jonny, but that in a mysterious way the Jews were brought somewhere and never returned, was certain to him. At last Janssen warned Jonny that their lives could be in serious danger if anyone found out. But Levy was allowed to inform his fellow Jews who were being persecuted and those who could be persecuted in the future. It is obvious that Jonny Levy gratefully made good use of this information.

The legislation allowing this persecution of the Jews was finalized on April 10th, 1943. On this day, every Jew had to report to Westerbork! With this last order the Jews who were still living in the Netherlands had a choice of two possibilities: to go (and die?) or not to go and “go underground”.

Not only the Jews were robbed in this ruthless way of their rights. Other Dutchmen were also involved in it, especially the men who were able to work. With the war on many fronts, the Germans needed many soldiers, especially when the war became a total character. All young, healthy men between about eighteen and forty years were called up to serve. This resulted in numberless vacancies in all sections of the [*German] economy. The production of needed goods and supplies were seriously stagnated. To keep them going, the Germans called up the laborers in the occupied countries to take over the jobs of the soldiers, the ‘Arbeidseinsatz’ [*A.G.: an euphemistic German word for “Labour Participation”; just “slavery work” is what the Dutchmen called it].

Many in the Netherlands were not charmed by that invitation and withdrew themselves from it with success, sometimes with the help of others and sometimes by themselves. Lesser fortunate Dutchmen, who were not able in any way to slip through the meshes of the laws of the tight regime of the occupier, departed fully against their will to Germany, where they were placed in all types of projects and employment. Those who refused, “dived under(ground)”, with all the consequences that accompanied that decision. Later those “work refusers” received the company of people from the Dutch Resistance and people who, by legislative sabotage and anti-collaboration against the occupier, soon realized the “ground under their feet became too hot”.

With this brief explanation about the categories uonderground-divers”, we come again to the story of Willem and Dina Geurink, the owners of a farm where the “door always stood wide open for people in need”.

VISITORS, FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE, AND THE COMING OF THE “UNDERGROUND-DIVERS”

To begin this story, the first persons to be accommodated by the Geurinks were not “underground-divers”, but two boys from Rotterdam. Rev. Delleman, who was just appointed minister in Rotterdam, and had worked for many years in Aalten, knew the Geurinks and Wisselink families well and they knew him as well. [*A.G.: Aalten is a small town about 5 miles south of Lichtenvoorde].

In the summer of 1941, Rev. Delleman offered some children in his parish a nice holiday in the “Achterhoek” [*A.G.: a Dutch word for the eastern part of the province of Gelderland]. One of the reasons for this extra holiday was because the center of Rotterdam was heavily destroyed by the German bombers in the battle days of May 1940]. Delleman appealed to his ex-parish members in the “Achterhoek” area. Without hesitation, the Geurink family readily complied with the invitation from the minister. They told Delleman they would like to host two boarders. Sometime later their request was promptly fulfilled and the Geurink family which already had two children – Lina (1939) and Bernard (1940) - was completed with the addition of Jan and Wout Berger, two boys from Rotterdam, who were respectively ten and twelve years old.

During the time the boys stayed with the Geurinks, about four weeks, the boys' older brothers Bas (1924) and Arie also came to visit with the Geurink family. Bas and Arie had biked all the way from Rotterdam to Lichtenvoorde. With the temporary hosting of the two little Berger brothers, a close bond was developed between the two families. In those times, in a geographic way, the two families lived far apart from one another. Later we will hear still more about the Bergers.

In October of 1941, more than a half year after the Germans carried out their notorious orders of January 31st, 1941, Willem and Dina Geurink, for the first time, became knowingly involved in the secret accommodating, the hiding of people. In this case it concerned two cousins of Jewish origin: Jonny Levy – who has been introduced earlier in this thesis – and Sally Levy from Varsseveld. [*A.G.: In the fall of 1941 Sallo Levy, Sally's father, was one of the first victims of the first brutal “Jewish hunt” by the Germans in this area. He died some weeks later in a German camp from what was described as heart disease].

The two cousins had been living for a considerable time with the Hendrik Heusinkveld family on the farm “Klein-Entink” in Varsseveld. Hendrik was an uncle of Willem Geurink and Dina (Wisselink) Geurink. The boys, who did not attend their school, because it was forbidden for the Jewish boys to commingle with Dutch children, helped Heusinkveld with his numerous chores and activities on the farm.

Hendrik Heusinkveld heard from Mayor Mr. Boot from Wisch [*A.G.: Wisch is an east-Gelderland municipality which includes the town of Varsseveld], who lived in Varsseveld in those days, that as soon as possible he was to bring the Levy cousins to another place because there was a concrete indication that at any moment his farm could be ransacked by the Germans. Hendrik Heusinkveld, a calm, patriotic man, immediately took action and made contact with Willem and Dina Geurink. He asked them if they would be willing to accommodate the boys for some weeks.

Willem, supported by his wife Dina, did not hesitate for a second about the situation. He agreed at once. On a dark October evening, Willem, on his unlighted bike, travelled on little narrow (sand) paths through the “Aaltense Goor” [*an area with only meadows and woods between the towns of Aalten and Lichtenvoorde and very thinly populated] and the “Venne” [*the name of the woods and marshes in the area] to the Klein-Entink farm to pick up the two boys. For ten days the two boys spent carefree days at the Geurink farm. They stayed until about three weeks prior to the birth of Johanna Hendrika [*Geurink], the third child of Willem and Dina (November 25, 1941). They were simply part of the family. That meant they worked on the farm by day, babysat in the late afternoon with the toddlers Lina and Bernard keeping them busy – maybe also the reverse – and enjoyed in the evening the socialization of an unaffected surrounding and slept safely at night in the cozy “opkamer”. [*A.G.: Means a bedroom, above the half underground food cellar on old Dutch farms, about 3 feet above the ground]. When it was again safe at the Klein-Entink farm, Willem brought the children back there again.

Around the beginning of May in 1942, the father of the little Berger brothers wrote a letter to Willem and Dina Geurink. Mr. Berger stated that his son Bas had recently celebrated his 18th birthday. As a consequence for this occasion, Bas was sent a summons from the ‘Nederlandse Arbeidsdienst’.

[*A.G.: The “Dutch Labour Office”]. On July 1st, 1942, he was to report to that office. Bas Berger did not want to be involved in any way with these orders. His parents supported his decision. Mr. Berger ended his letter with the question if maybe they – Willem and Dina – would know of a solution for this apparant problem?

The solution came by return mail. Willem let Mr. Berger know that Bas would be heartily welcomed at their farm. Bas' arrival on July 1st, 1942, in Lichtenvoorde as an “onderduiker” in the appropriate way, was listed in the Registrar's Office. Bas cancelled his listing as an office clerk in Rotterdam and listed himself as a land laborer in Lichtenvoorde. That daring transfer of occupations would later almost avenge itself. [*A.G.: In the first years of the war, the Germans allowed the farm laborers free of their work obligations in Germany when they did “essential fooding work for the Germans”; but later they were summoned too, with the explanation “the weapons were more important than the butter”].

During the five war years, Willem Geurink regularly wrote about the daily events in a diary. In itself, the keeping of a diary is a recommended activity. After all, human memories fade by time or become covered up by other experiences, meanwhile the written word can be kept for many generations. But on the other hand, the keeping of a diary in wartime is a precarious matter, especially when people have to hide a lot in a positive way. What should happen if by an eventual house search by the Germans, the diary of Willem was found? Willem and Dina had regularly thought and spoken to one another about this, without finding a fitting answer. The many objections to keeping the diary were ignored.

According to Jonny Levy, the minimization of keeping the diary was completely right. Jonny told me [*Mr. Henny Bennink], “The diary of Uncle Willem and Aunt Dina Geurink always was placed in an ‘unfindable’ place, under the baby carriage, where after the modification of the baby carriage to make it a ‘push chair’, there was leg room for two children. It is obvious”, Jonny continued, “that this leg room was not easily detected to any visitor because of how the board, on which the mattress, bed sheets and blankets were situated”.

Johnny: “There was another reason the baby carriage was chosen as a depository for the diary, namely: the carriage stood ready day and night. If there was something happening, i.e. war violence, fire or whatever, Uncle Willem and Aunt Dina could awaken the little kids, place them in the baby carriage and leave the premises”. [*A.G.: In the later years of her life, my mother, Dina, told me (Albert Geurink) that during the war she always ‘slept with one hand between her pillow and ear’, usually beside the youngest children in their front room, always being aware of every strange or dangerous noise ready to hastily leave the house with the baby in the carriage and the other children. She was so used to this habit that after the liberation she had to learn again to sleep without her hand under her ear. Lichtenvoorde was situated on the line from England to the “Industrial Heart” of Germany – the Ruhr Area - about 70 miles from my parents. Very often an increasing mass of Allied bombers came over the Geurink farm at night, returning in the earliest morning hours. These Allied bombers were constantly attacked on their way back by all kinds of German night fighters and aircraft artilleries].

According to the diary of Geurink, Bas Berger did not know the insurmountable problems he would have to face in becoming a farm laborer. An admitted city man, who was employed for some years in an office, Berger was rather clumsy with a fork and shovel. Using a fork and shovel was certainly nothing like using a fountain pen, a skill in which he was well versed. But gradually, he improved in his farming abilities, although it was quite obvious that Bas would never become a top farmer.

The feeling of loneliness, which Bas had sometimes experienced in the ‘country lands’ of Lichtenvoorde, faded away with the arrival of more Rotterdam boys to Lichtenvoorde: among them his brothers Arie and Henk. Arie was housed by a younger brother of Willem, named Gerrit Geurink. Gerrit lived on the farm named “De Groteman” in Lintelo, [*part of the municipality of Aalten], and Henk received shelter at the Heinen family in Lichtenvoorde. Because of the rather large number of Rotterdam boys living with families in the Lichtenvoorde and Aalten areas, a youth society for the “onderduikers” was created. The society organized various social evenings on a somewhat irregular schedule. The Berger brothers never missed those meetings.

Also the spiritual was not neglected. Regularly on Sundays, fitting church services for the “onderduikers” were organized. Those services were not held in the church, because that would be very dangerous, but in the home of one of the church members. To avoid any suspicion or difficulties, every Sunday a different home was chosen to hold the services.

1942-1943.

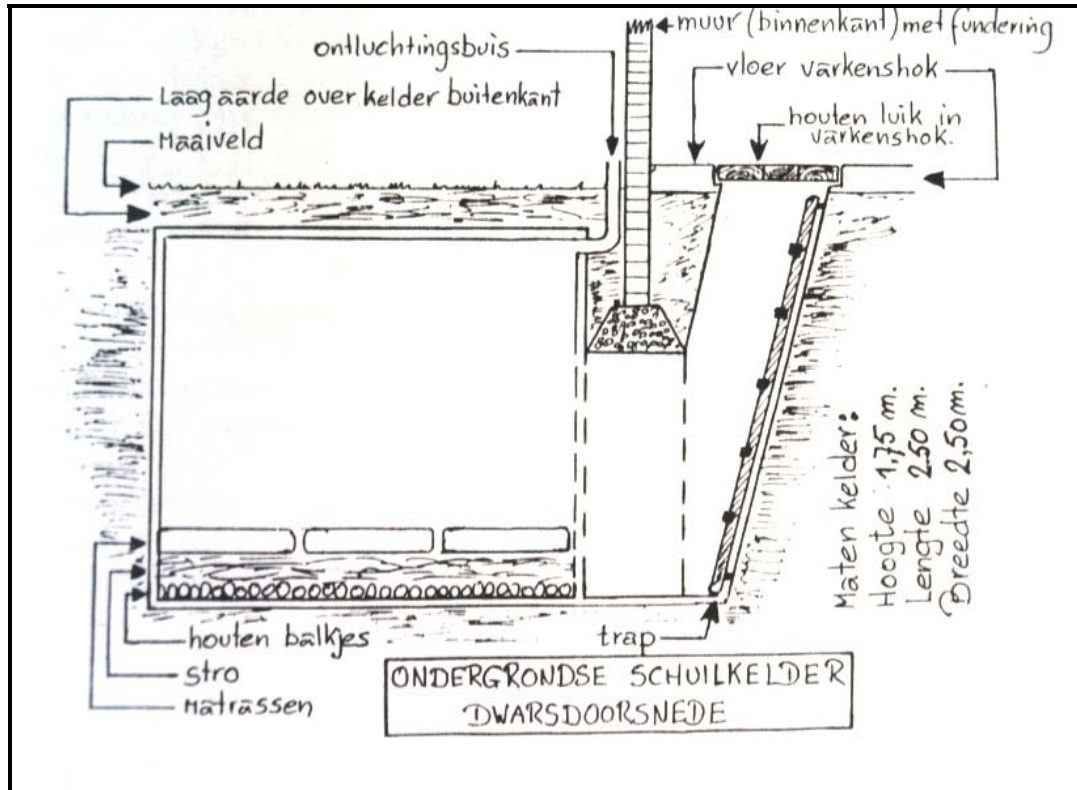
The tracing and searching methods of the German occupier became more and more brutish. Deportations of Jews, who lived for generations in the Netherlands, were the order of the day. They were roughly dragged from their homes, many times unable to take their most beloved possessions with them. They were led by scolding soldiers to the ready standing trucks where they had to take their place. Elderly and invalid folks, who lost the elasticity to climb the truck by their own force, were harshly helped by the soldiers. Local residents and, coincidentally, passengers were powerless against it; turning their faces away from the rounded up people, even unable to greet them for the last time.

As stated previously, all Jews had to report to the German occupier on April 10, 1943, in Westerbork. If Jewish origin folks obeyed this order, they faced a very uncertain future. Many Jews and non-Jews felt there was something rotten about the whole idea. They did not know exactly what, but still had a suspicion, more likely a fear of what could be true. Willem and Dina Geurink, [*their uncle] Hendrik Heusinkveld, on the farm “Klein-Entink”, and Linus Adolf and Wilhelmina Johanna Wisselink (Dina’s parents who lived on the farm “de Spieker”) had the same suspicious ominous feeling. Besides these suspicions, they remembered and considered the information of Wim Janssen about his experiences in Poland. The group decided they had to protect the “onderduikers” more prudently and understood the vital importance of these underground divers. With that objective in mind, Hendrik Heusinkveld visited his nephew and wife, Willem and Dina Geurink, in the early spring of 1943. Heusinkveld, who had been hiding the Levy family from Varsseveld, which included the father [*Leizer (or Leis) Levy], the mother [*Ella (Levy) Levy] and their three sons [*Jonny, Leon and Helmut], decided, together with Willem and Dina, that it would be much safer and better if Willem and Dina would care for the three sons: Jonny, Helmut (1928-1995) and Leon (1926-2004) Levy. (Jonny had previously lived with the Geurinks). However, the middle son was placed with the Wisselink family on the “Spieker” farm. (As stated before, the Wisselinks were the parents of Dina Geurink). Still another home had to be found for the Levy parents [*A.G.: Heusinkveld was already hosting another Jewish family]. On that same day, an offer to house the parents was received from the Wolsink family in Halle. [*Note A.G.: Halle is a village about 8 miles northwest of Lichtenvoorde]. Thus, the entire Levy family was now safely hidden with three different families.

The arrival of Jonny and Helmut Levy on April 10th, 1943, was a welcome variation for Bas Berger. Suddenly he had the company of two contemporaries. The boys conversed for hours with one another. Although, it must be ascertained the conversations could not be in the normal volume, that would be too dangerous. Vigilance and modesty was constantly required, not an easy task for the boys with all their future ideals in their time of adolescence.

In the beginning, the young men slept in the “opkamer”, with all the consequences of such an arrangement. If and when an unexpected group of Germans visited the farm – and that chance was quite possible – the misery would be more immense and intense. With the possibility of an unexpected visit, Willem and Dina decided, without any hesitation, to build the underground hiding cellar. [*A.G.: They had consulted with the Levy parents in Halle, who willingly paid the costs of the hiding cellar]. Awaiting this cellar, a provisional shelter was built in a dry ditch, in the front of the Geurink farm. The boys would stay in this shelter during the night. This was a wise decision, because the hunt for Jews and not willing to work “onderduikers” became more and more intense. [*A.G.: On Friday August 8th, 1943, the contractor, Mr. Wikkerink, came to the farm and made plans for the construction. The construction project was completed in six weeks].

Cross-Section of the Underground Hiding Cellar



[*Notes A.G.:

- The given sizes of this cellar are not quite correct: the real height of it was not 1,75 but only 1,37 meter – about 4½ (English) feet – thus the Levy boys could not stand up, even as boys. It's breadth was not 2,50 but only 2,26 meter (about 7½ feet). Total capacity about 7770 liters, in which sometimes five people stayed the night].
- Translation of the Dutch explanation in the drawing of the underground cellar:
 - “Muur (binnenkant) met fundering” = Wall (inside) with the foundation
 - “ontluchttingsbuis” = ventilation pipe
 - “vloer varkenshok” = floor of the pig sty
 - “laag aarde over de buitenkant van de kelder” = “a bed of soil above the cellar”
 - “maaiveld” = the ground
 - “houten luik varkenshok” = wooden trap door in the floor of the sty
 - “houten balkjes” = “little wooden beams
 - “stro” = straw
 - “matrassen” = mattresses
 - “Maten kelder” = Measures of the cellar
 - “Hoogte: 1,75 m.” = Height: 1,75 meter [*In reality it was 1,37 meters]
 - “Lengte: 2,50 m.” = Length: 2,50 meter
 - “Breedte: 2,50 m. = Breadth: 2,50 [*In reality it was 2,26 meters]

Outside, just against the façade and the underground foundation of the pig barn, Derk Huitink from Aalten, a thoroughly trustworthy man, who had been employed by contractor Jan Wikkerink for several year, built the walls of the hiding cellar in a few weeks. [*A.G.: In those days Jan Wikkerink was also the leader of the Aalten Resistance]. Willem Geurink acted as hodman [*a laborer employed in carrying supplies to a builder]. When Willem was asked by curious visitors, who came to inspect the activities, what was being built, he would tell them the construction was going to be a cistern. [*A.G.: Some of the curious folks included neighboring farmers who assisted the Geurinks in the summer of 1943 with the harvesting of rye and oats with a touring threshing machine. It was the custom to help one another].

The 25 centimeters (*10 inches) underground laying cellar had the size of 250 x 250 x 175 centimeters [*in reality 250 x 226 x 137 centimeters or 98 x 89 x 54 inches] and was only approachable from the inside, underneath the foundation of the (pig) sty. The height from the floor to the ceiling was only 175 centimeters. [*A.G.: In reality it was more like 137 centimeters or 54 inches!] It was impossible to stand erect. This situation could not be improved because raising the shelter even a half a meter would mean the cellar would rise above the underground or come below the underground water mark.

The entrance to the hiding place, a narrow shaft with a standard wooden ladder, was situated in the last pig sty. It was closed by a wooden trap door. In closed position the entrance to the cellar was invisible, especially when a bed of straw was placed over it. For evacuation and ventilation purposes, a zinc pipe with a diameter of about 10 centimeters [*about 4 inches] was installed. The pipe, attached to the ceiling of the cellar, rose inconspicuously just above the ground, hidden behind the real cistern. The evacuation and ventilation pipe also had another function which was of vital importance: namely, that of 'service pipe' for foods and drinks, in the event of an emergency. [*A.G.: During this cellar construction the Levy boys and Willem Geurink worked as guardians for two hours shifts during the nights. Willem Geurink took the last watch from 4:00 am until 6 o'clock in the morning. He used this time for writing in his diary before he started milking the cows].

In June 1943, the hiding cellar was completed and ready for occupancy. [*A.G.: In reality it was the end of September 1943, as Willem's diary states]. Little round wooden beams were placed on the floor of the cellar. Above these beams was a thick bed of straw and on the top of the straw the mattresses were placed. This is where the boys slept.

Jonny and Helmut did not stay all day and night in the cellar. Most of their time was spent sitting in the attic during the day. [*A.G.: This attic was located above the living, bedrooms and kitchen in the front of the farm]. From there they could keep their eyes on all the surrounding areas around the farm, about which later will be explained. If they spotted some trouble, they ran downstairs and took their places in the cellar, which then was closed in the previous explained way. They were allowed to appear if all was safe and Willem and Dina found it wise. The safe signal was given by a ruffling noise on the trap door or by whistling the 'Wilhelmus' [*A.G.: the Dutch National Anthem].

Leon Levy, who was staying with the Wisselink family, Dina's parents, on the "Spieker" farm, became very homesick for his two brothers. After some deliberation with the Wisselinks, Mr. Geurink decided to take Leon to Lichtenvoorde (to live with his brothers).

For the parents of the Levy brothers, who were hidden in the town of Halle, it was a good arrangement. To keep the family ties intact, in the first months they visited their children, one weekend to visit Jonny and Helmut at the Geurink [*family] and the other weekend to visit Leon at the "Spieker" farm.

Now that Leon was also living with his brothers at the Geurink farm, this arrangement eliminated one dangerous travel: a drive on bikes in the pitch darkness. Sometimes, if the circumstances were not good, with their bike in hand, they would stealthily run from tree to tree, over the fields and drenched meadows, to reach their destinations till they were reunited with their loved ones, often completely exhausted but grateful. If circumstances were very miserable, the Levy family of five would spend the night as a united family in the cellar of Mr. Geurink. The family could just fit into that small cellar. Even if it was not a comfortable situation, not one complaint passed their lips.

Later in the year [*of 1944] the parents stopped the visits to their boys. It became much too dangerous to continue the travel [*with the Jewish parents] from Halle to Lichtenvoorde. Yet the contact between the parents and the children did not stop. Both parents as well as the boys kept a diary, containing loose sheets of paper. Those loose sheets were exchanged weekly. One week Willem Geurink was the intermediary and the next week Mr. Wolsink took over that task. Instead of the dangerous visits, the exchange of the fully described diary sheets went well. By their [*Geurink and Wolsink] persistent silence about their activities, Mr. Wolsink and Mr. Geurink were not recorded in the book of suspects by the Germans. Because no record of these two gentlemen appeared, there was no reason to stop and search them. A good thing, too!

[*A.G.: During those weekend trips to the Levy parents in Halle, my father (Willem Geurink) had to cross diagonally the main road between Lichtenvoorde and Varsseveld near the inn "Radstake". Many times the Germans used this inn as a check point. They did this on Saturday evening, October 30th, 1943. That

afternoon the resistance leader, Cornelis Ruizendaal, had killed a Dutch collaborator in the neighboring village of Harreveld, consequently, the main road was completely blocked by the very agitated Germans and their trucks. My father assessed the problem from a distance and realizing the dangerous situation, immediately decided to return home, in spite of his arrangement with the Levy parents to take them by bike to visit their boys. You can imagine the parents, unaware of the road blockage, worried about the untold absence of Willem Geurink, who would bring them with the son of Mr. Wolsink to their boys on the Geurink farm, thinking the whole night that Willem and their boys probably were arrested at their hiding place in Lichtenvoorde. Adding to their distress was the thought of all the possibilities and consequences such an arrest would include.

The next Sunday morning, when it was quiet again on the main road, Willem biked again – this time with more succes – to the Levy parents in Halle, explaining to them that everything was okay with their boys. “Never seen such relief”, my father, Willem Geurink, would later tell us].

It was not only sorrow that was suffered in and around the farm, but there were also joyful events, which helped to soften and make more bearable the sorrow and tension of the “underdivers”; even in wartime, life goes on and people fall in love with one another.

About the tenth of August 1943, Bas Berger was visited by three Rotterdam girls. These girls were also taken in by the Geurinks. Bas Berger fell hopelessly in love with one of them: Co Edenburg. After some hesitation, Berger took his chances and asked her to marry him. (After the war they were married).

For the Levy brothers, the presence of the three girls was a serious problem. Not because they envied Bas and his happy time, oh no, on the contrary, but now they must be ‘double’ on their guard. The boys were not allowed by Willem to betray their presence in the Geurink house; the girls were not to find out about the Levys presence, instead they were completely bonafide. For-you-never-know! Unconsciously, one of them could shoot off her mouth! That meant that every morning the three had to be piloted, invisibly, from the hiding cellar to the attic. And – they were not allowed to make any noise in the attic.

As far as is known, Jonny, Leon and Helmut never allowed their presence in the attic be known. Surely, the three girls must have heard something now and then, but any suspicion on their part was immediately nipped in the bud by Willem: “Probably that was mice, there are a lot of them in the hay attic”, he stoically answered the girls, looking straight ahead, “and the tom cat is not willing to catch them, he is too lazy”. Hearing this story the girls quickly forgot about their wish to check out the attic, which was exactly what Willem intended. [*A.G.: One of them told us (Geurink children) some years ago – that during that period she had to stay longer on the Geurink farm because of illness – that one time she saw a running shadow on the stairs, but never talked about it].

The lovesick Bas Berger never divulged anything about the “onderduikers” Levys either. According to the Levys, Bas did not have such a difficult role. With Co near him, he was not lacking in numberless mellifluous little words of endearment. Bas considered himself fortunate, he was living with Co on an inhabited island, far away from the war rumors, far away from everybody, yet just in the delightful shadow of daily hard reality.

On the late evening of August 12th, 1944, Willem proudly informed the Levy brothers that his wife Dina had given birth to a healthy daughter Hendrika [*Rika], their fifth child.

Enthusiastic as they were after hearing this message, the Levys forgot everything and everybody around them. As soon as possible, they wanted to leave the cellar to hug their ‘Aunt Dina’. Willem, who sympathized with the feelings of the boys, said this could not be possible because of the Rotterdam girls. From the outside, they were full of understanding, but on the inside they were very sad, the Levys listened and accepted Willem’s admonition. Without showing their disappointment to Willem, the boys slinked back into the cellar. Dull, innumerable times duller than usual, the sound of the closing trap door fell over them. In silence the three brothers laid on their mattresses, in complete darkness, everyone with his own feelings of solitude. Deeply impressed, Willem, with bowed head, walked away, that late evening, from the sty to the living room. [*A.G.: Avoiding to be seen from outside the sty windows]. Instead of the joy around him with the birth of his new daughter, that evening Willem was not very talkative. The disappointed glances of three pair of the boys’ dark eyes deeply moved him.

In the late summer of 1944, it appeared for a time that the Allies would soon liberate the Netherlands from the south. Fighting in Arnhem – The Battle of Arnhem, from September 17th until the 26th, 1944, – left undamaged hands on the Rhine Bridge which was the intention of the attack. It was bad enough those fights had come to nothing, mainly by the misjudged failures of the Allies and the fierce resistance of the Germans, something the Allies have not counted on. In those emotional episodes of the war, it seemed that on a regular basis something went wrong between our Eastern neighbors. Considering the mad top leaders of the ‘Third Empire’, hardly anyone believed in the victory. The increasing defeatism, relieved by moments of unprecedented fanaticism, extremely influenced the war effort of the Germans. Guardians, who sheduled the normal way of behavior and activities in the labor camps, factories or prisoner camps, were by this time very unbelievably obliging. On other days they were relentness and severe. Between these two extremes, they were mostly careless and were already thinking about how times would be after the war. Quite possibly, the Russian prisoner-of-war, Alex Sidorov, made his profits from the desintegrating Germans. At certain times he seemed to lose the attention of his guardians. In that way, Alex never told about or explained his dealings or behavior. Neither did he tell where he was imprisoned in Germany or how long. A farmer in Yzerlo, [*A.G.: a surburb of Aalten, neighoring the Dutch-German border], found the Russian in a rye field. At the time he was wearing shabby, frayed trousers, was very undernourished, and bare footed. The Yzerlo farmer brought the Russian to his farm, where the family served him a meal. Then the farmer biked to ‘Uncle’ Jan Wikkerink, contractor and resistance leader, and informed him of the strange gentleman his family had taken in, who was not able to speak the Dutch language.

‘Uncle Jan’ called in two resistance people: wooden shoemaker, Mr. Ligterink, from Barlo [*Note A.G.: Another surburb of Aalten] and Antoon Nusselder from [*the town of] Winterswijk. Those two immediately biked to Yzerlo to talk with the Russian, judged the case by its true merits and settled the matter.

On Saturday August 14th, 1944, Mr. Ligterink and Mr. Nusselder visited Mr. Geurink and asked him if the Geurinks could accomodate another boarder for a maximum of two to three weeks. Dina and Willem didn’t think long - of course, they could! The next day, on the baptismal day of Hendrika, Alex Sidorov was transported by Mr. Nusselder to the Geurink home. Alex appeared to speak some German and gradually talked more about his background, always careful not to share too much information. He was married, had two children, enjoyed a technical education on the university level and lived in Nidzji Novgorod (formerly called Gorki), located about 500 kilometers east of Moscow. Just after his vocational education he was called up for military service. He was incorporated into the Air Force and trained as an air fighter. Sidorov remained silent about his experiences as an air fighter. [*A.G.: His true military unit or rank always remained a mystery].

Compelled by necessity, Alex was sheltered in a section of the wagon barn behind the farm. Some time earlier that area was made a hiding place with piles of straw and bundles of sticks and iron for just such an emergency. Now that hiding place came in very handy: Sidorov could stay there for as many nights as needed until a better hiding place could be found for him.

The next day, Linus Adolph Wisselink, Dina’s father, visited the farm. He built another hiding place in the hay attic, above the bike shed and against a fire-proof wall which separated the attic from the front of the house. This was only reachable with the use of a rope ladder [*A.G.: from the bike shed downstairs]. Mr. Sidorov could increase his safety by pulling up the rope ladder, keeping it invisible from the outside. The Russian spent more than seven months sleeping in this hiding place. During the day, he stayed in the attic along with the Levy’s [*in the front (living quarters) part of the farm].

The chance the Allies would change the tide of the war in the latter part of the summer against the Germans (for the better), also showed the Dutch collaborators a bleak future. Many a man was in sackcloth and ashes about it. One of them, Mr. Th. A. Lamers, a man who was appointed as Mayor of Lichtenvoorde by the Germans, agreed with that perspective and was already taking precautionary measures.

One day Lamers called up the rural policeman, Mr. B. Ter Haar, a silent man who disliked Mr. Lamers intently. Mr. Ter Haar appeared at the ordered time in the room of his ‘superior’. To the great astonishment of Mr. Ter Haar, Mr. Lamers asked if he knew of a good hiding place in the direct neighborhood, where he could safely take his family – just in case the Germans should lose the war.

Mr. Ter Haar, totally caught off guard, thought awhile deeply about the situation and arranged with the Mayor to search for something for him.

Immediately, Mr. Ter Haar biked to Willem Geurink who was plowing a field behind his farm. After proper greetings, the rural policeman asked Geurink if, in case of an emergency, he would be willing to make a little room on his farm for the Lamers family. Willem, who for awhile was doubting the integrity of Ter Haar, changed color after hearing this question. "How can you yet ask that, man?". Shaken, Geurink replied to the rural policeman, standing there imperturbably. "You well know that we host here three Jews, a Russian, and a number of unwilling workers?" "Surely, I know that", was Ter Haar's calm reply, "but if the Lamers family will be hosted here, and the Germans lose the war, the resistance will know where to find the Lamers couple. Do you follow me? Think about it, Willem", Ter Haar said, as he picked up his bike, "and let me know your answer this evening, before 7.30 p.m. Will you?"

[*A.G.: Except for their closest relatives only the contractor and resistance leader "Uncle Jan" (Mr. Wikkerink), the rural policeman Ter Haar, Geurink's minister Rijper, and another resistance man, Hendrik Leemreize, from the neighborhood, knew about the "onderduikers" on the Geurink farm].

With mixed emotions, Willem mumbled to himself a long time while doing his plowing, about the just raised situation: "Accomodate Mr. Lamers, a head to foot NSB-functionary, who in the past through him had also arrested a Jewish family, in the presence of his "onderduikers". [*Note A.G.: NSB stands for the "Nationale Socialistische Beweging", translated meaning the "National Socialist Movement", the collaborating Nazi Party of Holland]. That was totally incompatible with reality. Nothing except playing with fire in the presence of a powder keg could compare to that. Willem was sure it would come to "murder and homicide" on his farm at the end.

In the late afternoon Geurink discussed the request with his wife, Dina, and Bas Berger. They wondered if they had to involve Alex and the Levy brothers to discuss their new predicament. After mature deliberation, they decided to leave it, why should the boys be unnecessarily involved and troubled by it. Around seven o'clock in the evening, Geurink walked to the Ter Haar home and told Ter Haar they had accepted his proposal. Just where he would find a suitable place on his farmstead for the Lamers family was uncertain. One thing was for certain: it would not be a comfortable place and would be situated as far as possible from the farm.

The hosting of the Lamers family never materialized. The started offensive by the Allies in Arnhem and Nijmegen, which had held such great hopes for the Dutchmen, came to a deadlock, a fact already well known and mentioned previously. Still a long, bitter war winter followed.

In the meantime, because of many causes, mainly the lack of raw materials, the desintegration of "Das Dritten Reich" [*Note A.G.: German expression, their "Third Empire"] continued indefatigably. Thank God there was no longer talk of a coordinated policy of tracing the "onderduikers". However, that did not mean that in those days they could be of lesser vigilance for the "onderduikers" and the accommodating families, they still had to be extra careful. While a feared cat can suddenly make "strange jumps", any recklessness in this situation could be disastrous. Infrequently, the "onderduikers" were caught. This happened mostly by betrayal or indiscretion. Those who were unlucky enough to be caught, were severely punished. The same was true for their helpers.

Fortunately the counterpart of the occupier, the Dutch Resistance, became more and more organized. By a network of anonymous informants, much information was intercepted prematurely about what the Germans and their henchmen aimed to do. The result of this networking was that people nominated to be caught, could be previously warned. Promptly they took to their heels. Their flights ended at a hiding address, where they stayed for some days or weeks, depending upon the 'good acts' performed by them.

Because of this procedure, a concourse of 'onderduikers' landed at the Geurink farmstead, especially after December of 1944. Listed in alphabetic order, they were:

- Jan Berger, a brother of Arie, Bas, Henk and Wout, a quartet mentioned previously in this dialogue. Jan Berger refused to dig grave trenches or anti-tank ditches for the Germans.
- Piet Hooglugt, official of Social Affairs of the municipality of Lichtenvoorde.
- Minister Rijper, who because of his daring anti-German activities, conducting some of them at great risk, he stayed a night at the Geurinks and hid between the bundles of sticks and straw in the wagon shed.
- Albert Wisselink, [*A.G: a younger brother of my mother Dina Geurink, also involved in the resistance movement]. He had to run away because the Germans were looking for him.
- Two Ukrainians, who, just as Alex Sidorov, were escaped from a German prisoner-of-war camp.
- [*A.G.: Also Co Edenburg, the girlfriend of Bas Berger, came during the last winter months prior to the liberation, on her tubeless bike from Rotterdam, seeking more food and company].
- [*A.G.: Finally, there was an unknown Dutchman, possibly coming from The Hague or neighborhood, and probably escaped from a German camp. He was completely underfed, dressed in rags and coughed heavily, obviously very ill. My parents (Willem & Dina Geurink) hosted and fed him for some days while the man warmed himself near their kitchen stove. Later my mother, Dina, remembered that she kept the children at a rather safe distance from him, fearing an infectious disease (like tuberculosis or something else). Decades later an unknown man stepped out of his car at the Geurink farm, telling the Geurinks that he was the unknown, underfed refugee, who had slept in the farm's haymow near the end of the war. He stated he had warmed himself by the kitchen stove. He was very grateful for the Geurink's valuable help and hospitality. And then he left again, still an unknown man].

All were hospitably accommodated.

Several times Bas Berger was visited by an official of the "Arbeitseinsatz" who urged him emphatically to report for activities in Germany. Every subsequent visit, this official became more threatening to the farm laborer from Rotterdam. Willem Geurink, who had also received repeated summons, thought it was better if Bas Berger would find another hiding place with a different family for awhile. Willem sent him to his younger brother [*Gerrit Geurink] on [*the farm named] "de Groteman". Very unexpectedly, Bas Berger was caught there by the Germans.

[*A.G.: On Saturday morning, October 28th, 1944, suddenly a German truck stopped there, probably looking for food. The "onderduikers", who were working outside, quickly dispersed to hide themselves. That attracted the special attention of the Germans and they promptly arrested them and drove away with aal of them. Bas, who was just approaching the farm by bike, noticed the Germans and drove past the farm. In the meantime my Uncle Gerrit, was busy working in his mangel-wurzel (*a kind of cattle feed, similar to beets) field and promptly hid himself behind the mangel leaves. When the Germans left the farm, Bas Berger and my uncle waited for some time until they concluded that it was safe again to enter the "Groteman" farm, totally unaware that the Germans were coming back, which they soon did. Later it was learned that through various physical inquiries of the Germans, one of the arrested "onderduikers" told the Germans that the "Groteman" farm was also hiding a forbidden radio, typewriter and more - all necessary equipment for an illegal Dutch resistance newspaper. The Germans returned to the "Groteman" farm for a detailed search and arrested the two men, Bas Berger and Gerrit Geurink. They were totally unaware that the little black boy, "Jan Geurink", laying in the baby carriage, a so-called 'related' child, was in reality a hidden Jewish boy, with the real name Willem Martinus Jacobs. In the next days, more members of the local resistance group were arrested, one of them being Gerrit's eldest brother, Uncle Hendrik Geurink. Coincidentally, on that sad day, Arie Berger, brother of Bas, was busy working on the neighboring Pennings farm, where he wisely stayed until the end of the war].

Bas Berger was taken by truck and transported to a prisoner's camp in the German town of Marl [*about 70 miles into Germany]. After more than seven weeks he was set at liberty and returned to Lichtenvoorde very thin and undernourished.

[* A.G.: Together with Bas, the other released prisoners came back, including the brothers, Gerrit and Hendrik Geurink. All came back except for a sick "onderduiker" who could not be found in the local German hospitals by the rest of his Dutch group, before they finally returned home. Tragically, he died later at an unlocated German hospital from diphtheria. Their unexpected release is a very strange and unbelievable story. Both of the Geurink brothers had to work during the day on a German market garden in the neighborhood of the camp of Marl. Since 1932, this market garden was owned by a Dutch horticulturist, Mr. De Wit, and his German wife. De Wit was made aware of the shocking camp stories and bad appearances of my uncles, the Geurinks. He wanted to do something for them. De Wit visited the very brutish German commander of the camp on his motor bike. De Wit was well dressed on this cold December day, wearing a long leather coat. Being aware during his talk with the commander and noticing the commander looked enviously at his leather coat, he made the commander this proposal: "You can have this coat when you set the Dutch group at liberty", De Wit chided.

First the commander threatened De Wit and bellowed at him telling him that he, too, should be sent to prison with his illegal corruptive suggestions. However, at the end of their long and deep discussion, the commander agreed: "Okay, the whole group of Dutch prisoners versus that leather coat of you, plus some Dutch tobacco and bacon!", the commander ordered. After the war the released Dutchmen paid this leather coat debt back to Mr. De Wit with a fat Dutch cow].

Berger had a legal I.D. card in his pocket, with the address of his employer, Willem Geurink. Willem received a written paper message from his uncle Hendrik Heusinkveld, advising him that it would be much safer for him also to 'dive' now for awhile 'under the ground'. On this small paper, which was brought to him by a little girl of thirteen was written this message: "Bas is arrested! Willem, take yourself off!" Willem did not throw the message to the wind, he followed the advice and 'dived' for a week 'underground' on his own farm. He moved in with Alex Sidorov in the hay attic, the hiding place above the bike shed, which was located against the fire wall.

Slowly the clock ticked the last, long war months away. Difficult months of many hardships and longings for liberation were on the minds of the people. Do people live in normal times just from one day to the next, now they were living from hour to hour and even lesser times frequently. There was a chronic lack of provisions. Willem and Dina were permanently confronted with the question: 'Where must the food for us and the 'onderduikers' come from?' Sometimes there was nothing left and they had to tighten their belts. [*A.G.: During the weeks towards the war's end, there were weeks when Willem and Dina had thirteen extra mouths to feed]. But instead of dwelling on the negatives, there prevailed a modest joy, probably more an intense hope, about this terrible war, which they knew could not last too much longer.

The positive messages about the progression of the Allied troops intensified their hope. These messages were regularly sent to the "onderduikers" by the Rev. Rijper. But in those awful days of hope and despair, it turned out that the real venom of this war was to come at the very end. On the evening of March 12th, two bombs fell near the farm; one exploded twenty-five meters behind the wagon barn. All the people at the farm were uninjured. But their one and only horse was killed. However, the bombs caused a great deal of damage to the farmstead. Jonny Levy wrote about it in his March 13th, 1945, diary entry:

*"Last evening, about a quarter past ten, we were startled by an ear-splitting detonation, followed by a terrible tumult of falling tiles and breaking glass. Leen (*nickname for Leon) slept soundly, but I was just between 'heaven and earth' and heard the bomb coming. We could only think that the whole farm was going to be demolished. By a crack in the wall, the water started to leak. Karel (*nickname for Bas Berger), who has risen just before the bomb fell, reported that everybody was unharmed, but that the farm had suffered more damage. The horse, hit by the shells, lay dead in the stable. Aunt (Dina Geurink) thought it better to stay in the [*hiding] cellar, her attitude was admirable, her calmness was exceptional. The inhabitant of The Hague (one of the Berger boys) was sleeping on the inside hay pile, when he suddenly saw a clear sky with stars above him. [*A.G.: Seems to me not quite correct, very probably he was that unknown camp refugee, as mentioned before].*

*According to Jaum (*the French equivalent for Willem Geurink) the house gave a spooky image. All sleeping was done for the night. Leen was rather upset and I tried to calm him. We are yet every day in danger, every moment of the day and night. We can only pray for our safety, do what we can and for the rest give over yourself to a higher power in the trust of a good end. When the water started to raise above the laths, the leaking happily stopped”.*

[*A.G.: Explaining a bit more about the bombing damages: all the red roofing tiles on the wagon barn were broken or disappeared completely (the walls of it were broken and split) just like 25 % of the same red tiles on the farm and pig barn were destroyed. One big wooden backdoor of the farm was completely split and pulled from the wall. All the window panes on the N.W. and S.E. sides of the farm had fallen in and broken into tiny pieces. My (Albert’s) elder brother, Johan, was sleeping in his bed near a window in the front living room. All those pieces of the broken window panes landed on his bed, but, wonder of wonders, did not harm him, he did not even receive a scratch! The roof of the pig barn was lifted a bit by the air pressure. Several shells flew through the southern back wall and doors. One of those hit the horse in her breast in a deadly manner. A smaller shell made a hole in the so called ‘wash house’ door, very close to where my father had just shut the door as he was making his last rounds through the farm before bedtime. My father’s hired hand, Klaas Schuurman, slept that evening with my uncle Albert Wisselink in the higher room above the food cellar. Klaas wanted to get out of bed with bare feet, but my uncle Albert advised him to put his socks on first, because the floor and bed were covered with small glass chips.

With the help of Klaas and Albert, my father tried to save his horse with some rags placed in her large breast wound, but it was a hopeless endeavor. Later Klaas was sent to the butcher near the town, even though it was long after the German curfew. A Dutch ‘landwachter’ (*meaning a collaborating Dutch assistant policeman of the occupier), stopped Klaas on the road to town, but left him go because of the special emergency. But on his way back, he was stopped by this man again and asked the question “If his employer also hid pilots?” Klaas denied it and the man accepted his answer.

Later, when a neighboring farmer and the butcher arrived, they fastened a pulley to the big beams in the top of the barn and attached the pulley ropes to the dead horse’s legs. They lifted the dead mare over the low stable wall, placed the horse on a wagon, which they had shoved under the large animal. She was brought to the butcher’s shop in town, by another horse. By request, my parents received about 20 pounds of horse meat in the next few days, plus the four legs. With the horse’s legs in a sack, my father went on his bike to the blacksmith and asked the blacksmith to retrieve the horse shoes for him].

For more than two weeks, the ‘Geurink boys’ had to keep hidden from the neighborhood. This was no easy task, especially considering the damaged farm was an object of concern for sympathizing relatives, neighbors and acquaintances, and, not to forget the soldiers of the occupying forces.

On the very last night the Levys had to hide in the cellar, they were put through yet another test. On March 31st, 1945, some small but hard fought fights were held in Barlo between the retiring Germans and the fast approaching Allies. (*Barlo is located between Lichtenvoorde and Aalten). The whole day the roar of guns and the rattling of machine guns could be heard interspersed with some heavy boomings of exploding German ammunition wagons.

All the people on the farm, dead tired from all the emotions caused by the violence, were gone to bed. Soon they fell in a deep sleep. Because of this, nobody on the farm noticed that some [*retiring] German soldiers had forced the cellar window in the Geurink home during the late night. They entered the cellar and came out carrying some jars of plum preserves. The soldiers walked, with their prize, to the cistern almost immediately above the hiding cellar. They seated themselves on the cistern and ate the plums, talking about the ‘verdamnten Krieg’ [*A.G.: German words, meaning ‘rotten war’]. The Levys, who could follow the German conversation word by word, immediately understood that the Germans could hear them as well, from their side.

They kept themselves noiseless; after all, every move in the straw could cause a crackling noise. This noise could betray their presence by the ventilation pipe, hidden behind the cistern. For about an hour, the boys laid motionless in the hiding cellar, an endless time between hope and fear. This serious situation lasted until just before dawn.

[*A.G.: That night Alex Sidorov slept near the Jewish boys in a straw shelter at the end of the attic of the pig barn, right above the entrance of the underground cellar. He also heard some outside noises from the

unknown burglars. Very carefully he lowered himself through the attic trap door, landing on a one meter high brick wall between the last two pig styes. He could see, in the dark, through some barn windows. And saw the two German soldiers, just sitting a few meters distance from the outside of the cistern! To his enormous relief, with only a view of their back sides, he was able to look the situation over. Immediately Alex hid and kept himself noiseless, just like the underground brothers.

But that wasn't the only 'narrow escape': Two days before the final liberation, three Dutch German-minded assistant policemen, in their green uniforms, summoned my parents, Willem and Dina, for their last pig. This was on Good Friday. The order was collaborated by the local Mayor, Mr. Lamers, and the German police. The German document ordered my parents to deliver "1 pig, for the care of the [*German] troops" (in German language "1 Schwein, fuer die Verpfegung der Truppe"). To my parents' relief the three policemen left the farm after this command without the pig. But soon they returned, now in the company of a butcher from town and a trailer. The butcher was ordered to slaughter the pig and my parents were told to boil a large amount of water in their big stove which was located at the end of the pig barn. During this operation all the policemen kept an eye on the procedure, one of them even stood the entire time on the last pig sty just near and above the secret trap door to the cellar. After some hours, the policemen left the farm with all the meat, leaving my parents with only the German document. My mother kept this document until her death. They would rather have been paid for the pig, instead of this 'Official German Document', however, 'they never saw a penny back for their last lost pig'].

THE DAILY LIFE OF THE 'ONDERDUIKERS' IN THEIR HIDING PLACES

There was not much variation in the daily life of the 'onderduikers'. Every morning they exchanged their nocturnal hiding place for the daytime hiding place: the attic. Their main daily duty was "to see without being seen". Constantly, never leaving their sentry, they spied the roads in the surrounding countryside: to the south, north and east side through windows and to the west through a lifted tile in the [*slanting] surface of the roof. With damp and chilly weather it wasn't a pretty job. The wind blew in their faces through the hole, often resulting in pain to the eyes, bleak cheeks and deep chap lips, especially in the winter. Finally an old tom cat – indeed, that same old tom cat, that had not learned the practice of hunting mice – brought help. Willem slaughtered the useless animal and Dina made soup of him. On the surface of the soup, the floating fat was skimmed and collected in a little pot. Before assuming their sentry post, the boys oiled themselves slightly with it. It worked wonderfully!

Between their sentry duties, they did all kinds of little jobs. With this they passed away the tiresome waiting times. Their main occupation was the handling of tobacco. Bas Berger took care of the supply, under the supervision of Willem. The four in the attic produced shag, cigars and pipe tobacco. Was that tobacco good to chew? Absolutely not! One time Willem filled his pipe in the company of others with the self made tobacco, lit it, drew a few times and blew the smoke in the direction of the company. That tobacco smoke must have been so poisonous that the whole group ran away.

Alex Sidorov was well trained in making ornaments. With endless patience, he fashioned a silver coin with a little hammer, making a beautiful ring. It was not distinguishable from a real store-bought one. The Levys followed his example, now and then assisted by Alex. [*A.G.: My mother, Dina, wore a ring of Alex on her finger her entire life, as a lasting memory of Alex Sidorov. Alex had a fatal destination when he returned to Russia. (He never saw his family in Gorki again). Now an elder sister, Dina's third daughter, keeps the ring].

From second-hand materials, the four made two airplanes. One of them was lost. [*A.G.: It was destroyed in realistic playing when the children burned it in the stove: "Look, a real burning bomber!"]. The other airplane is exhibited at the 'National Camp Vught', a museum in connection with 'No Child's Play' (from May until August 2001), organized by the 'Stichting Vrienden van Yad Vashem' (*Foundation Friends of Yad Vashem'). Beginning in 2005 this airplane will be shown in the just opened 'Onderduik Museum" in the neighboring town of Aalten].

Leon, who was educated in the textile business, loved to make [*and repair] clothes. With this talent, he helped 'Aunt Dina' and made a farmer's blouse for his eldest brother from a piece of material. About that blouse and some more experiences Jonny wrote on March 20th, 1945, in his diary:

*"Yesterday afternoon there came here some 'Eierkäufer' [*A.G.: German word for 'buyers of eggs'], from whom we had to disappear a while. When the 'Jerrries' left, Uncle Willem told us: "They will get something when the cocks lay eggs".*

[*A.G.: My father's (Willem) refusal to meet the Germans request made the German soldiers so furious that they smashed most of the windows in the chicken barn, beside the farm, with the butt of their rifles. 'No eggs? No windows either!'].

I started to construct a truck for little Johan, who has his anniversary a week from tomorrow .

*The 'motte' [*A.G.: translated 'pig'] has eaten my black little blouse. Such a pity, it was such an easy thing. She surely won't be fat of it.*

*The [*German] air defense, which is very active in the last days, is interesting. Happily they shoot suprisingly bad. First you see the little wreaths of smoke of exploding grenades [*in the air], than we hear the detonations: hoch, hoch, bang'.*

Willem and Dina had no lack of helpers in the home. The potatoes were peeled, the clothes were repaired, the wood cut and the rye and oats placed in sheaves. These sheaves, which were brought in the barn on wagons, were loaded with a hayfork in the attic. That last job could be done by just two men at the same time. The other ones kept an eye on the 'Vasseveldseweg' [* the road from Lichtenvoorde to the next town Varsseveld], the 'Derde Broekdijk' [*the sand road in front of the house] and the 'Schievegatsdijk' [*another sand road to the town of Lichtenvoorde]. This constant watchfulness could never be neglected.

The progress of the war, as it appeared in the diary of Jonny Levy, also provided some diversion. On January 14th, 1945, he wrote:

*"Today we went through the sensation of an air-battle. This went as follows: About 2 o'clock this afternoon, I was sitting on the lavatory. I suddenly heard shooting and after it a heavy motor yelping. Coming from behind the house, I saw a black column of smoke of a 'brought down' plane at the other side of the [*Varsseveld] road. From the attic, the boys had seen how it all happened.*

*High in the sky there was an air battle and a moment later a machine fell down like an arrow, with a wreath of smoke behind it. Just at the very last moment, the pilots jumped out. While the plane already was too close to the ground and the parachutes did not quite open, the pilots fell down to the ground almost together with the plane, which crashed into pieces; fire and black smoke. A petrol tank fell behind the house of Han (*neighbor Herman Olieslager). The air was full of shooting and turning machines, wreaths of smoke of artillery, rattling of machine guns, and parachutists.*

*On a certain moment, columns of smoke rose from just seven planes. One was entering us in fire, raised again and disappeared for good in the southern direction, pursued by the hunters. Some time later a two engined German plane passed us, leaving a brown wreath of smoke behind and crashed burning in the direction of the town V (*Varsseveld).*

All this happened in no more than ten minutes. When the first 'Jerry' crashed, the village sounded an air-raid warning. When the safety signal was given again, surely more than seven planes burned on the ground, as far as we could count. The 'Tommy' did their jobs well. Never seen such a thing. But not without any danger.

*In the 'Ardennen' are 35,000 Germans surrounded and the Americans have landed on the island Luzon in the Philippines. This island is occupied by 50,000 Japanese soldiers. It is just about 130 kilometers [*about 84 US miles] to Manilla. Regularly V1's and V2's take off. Tomorrow we maybe will go threshing."*

Especially the sentence, 'Tomorrow we will maybe go threshing' speaks volumes. The four young men, at that moment were already limited in their freedom of movement for a long period, looked forward to a change. Their bodies needed it. Any unconditional indulging to their need for change was dangerous to life. Every moment of the day, and this was repeatedly emphasized by Willem and Dina, the dangers were always close by.

The conception of night had a special meaning for the four 'onderduikers'. For them it started very early, as soon as darkness approached, when it was no longer possible to distinguish vehicles or people, Alex climbed his rope ladder to the hay attic and the Levys descended the ladder to the cellar.

They experienced the night as a long, long period in which everybody was thrown back at themselves, especially Alex, who slept alone in the hay attic. The Levy brothers could discuss their experiences some

time before sleeping, although circumstances, in which it had to take place were far from ideal. The nocturnal loneliness was drifted away by the dawn, after the reveille with the whistling of the national anthemn [*by the Geurinks, an indication that it was safe to come out of the cellar]. In the summertime, it was easier to deal with the hiding places because the nights were relatively short and the temperatures pleasant. In the wintertime, it was very unpleasant, especially for the Levy brothers. I can not emphasize that enough. At about half past five in the afternoon, Jonny, Leon and Helmut went to the hiding place. This was not the most pleasant part of the day, although they never complained. [*A.G.: During the short winter day, the day began about 8.30 a.m. in the morning. Consequently, the brothers had to sit for 16 continuous hours in their small, cold, stuffy and stinking cellar (no way at any time to go outside to the lavatory). And when it was a foggy day, they had to stay in their underground hiding place for 24 hours. In the summertime, their big St. Bernard dog, Prins, often kept a watchful eye and ear on the sand road, but this was not possible in the wintertime. Besides these precautions, my parents, Willem & Dina, had constructed an extra, soundless warning system with a hidden rope in the food cellar to the attic upstairs. Using this contraption, the 'boys' could see when some unwatched people were nearing or entering the farmstead, when – by example – they were entering the farm from the south through the fields if no one was working outside. This area was a dangerous 'dead corner' from the observation post in the dormer window of the 'tobacco attic'. Because of this 'dead corner', one time two German soldiers peered, very suddenly, through the small windows in the back of the barn. Here they could see my father and Alex threshing their corn with old fashioned flails on the concrete floor (a practice that was completely illegal). With fear and terror, my father and Alex realized that the unwarned Levy boys were still in their attic in the front and totally unaware of this big danger. It was far too late to hide themselves in the normal places. Fortunately, my mom, Dina, received the soldiers at the side door and guided them away from the farm. On another occasion, when my parents were busy in the fields and my oldest sister, who was about 5 years old, was keeping an eye on the house and the younger children, their minister, Rev. Rijper came into the kitchen and tried to figure out if he could see or speak to my parents. My sister thought the whole situation was much too 'delicate' and complete silence enveloped the kitchen. Suddenly, she remarked: "*But we have five cows!*" (It seemed better to her to reveal this information than to say we have five 'onderduikers'?)].

The underground space was bare and chilly. The dark hole in the pig sty seemed unfathomably deep; not very inviting and still accentuated by all kinds of smells, mainly caused by the enduring precense of moisture. The ventilation was insufficient. Constructing more ventilation would have been possible, but that would be at the cost of safety; nobody wanted that.

In the late evening their breath condensed against the cold ceiling, which increased to the stage of heavy drops of water lining the ceiling. This condensation appeared during the early part of the night. Just before those drops would fall, one of the boys would sweep the ceiling clean with old cloths. The sopping wet cloths were thrown in a corner.

After hours and hours, of seemingly endless time, the long night was finally over. The boys were intensely joyful and grateful, not only had the night ended, but they had also survived another night. The first sounds of the 'Wilhelmus' [*the Netherlands national anthemn] whistled by Willem was a beautiful and welcome tune.

Hopefully, they climbed out of their 'holes' and went to greet an uncertain dawn. The wet cloths from drying the cellar ceiling were brought to the kitchen, hung on the chrome plated pipe around the kitchen stove to dry. Then the boys proceeded to walk timidly upstairs to the attic; to the next surviving 24 hours.

The Levy's repeated this routine for 470 times, Alex Sidorov about 220 times. The days and nights of Bas Berger I will omit from this thesis out of consideration. Bas Berger's position was different from the other 'onderduikers', not comparable to the four others. Others who stayed with the Geurink family for a shorter period of time were much like the Levy brothers experiences.

To express the feelings of the boys in hiding places, and to use the rights words, I quote again Jonny Levy's diary:

*"Sinterklaas' eve, 1944. [*December 5, 1944]. The wind howls through the trees. It is dark, pitch dark. Tonight no 'St. Nicolaas' celebration, but a deep darkness, with not any little ray of light. Our thoughts go back to the former sociable evenings at home. Now, this eve, again passes by, like the circumstances are. Our Dear Lord is with us and that yet is a feast in our inner life.*

We are gratefully disposed towards that we have been spared till now. I hope that this will stay till the big day appears, the day of liberation.

With God's help we are home at 'Sint Nicolaas', 1945, in peace and liberty, united with our parents and all our dearly beloved, especially with those whose fate is still unknown to us, so far from home. May He spare them too and bring them safely back, when the big day will be here.

Then 'Sint Nicolaas' will be like in former days'.

CONCLUSIONS

The intense supplications of Alex Sidorov, the Levy brothers and all the others who were hidden by the Geurinks, were answered. After the liberation they appeared unharmed from their experiences and went their separate ways.

Their thankfulness to Willem and Dina Geurink was huge. Just how big was their graciousness to their 'hiding parents' was explained to me when I [*writer Henny Bennink] visited the house of Jonny and Dini (Davidson) Levy in [*the city of] Deventer on Friday, August 1st, 2000.

Kind, polite, vivacious in nature, almost even boyish, Jonny told his story. His story showed much respect for other people's beliefs. About his residence in the 'hiding cellar' and the days in the attic, Jonny talked with enthusiastic thankfulness: "Animosity between us and the other 'onderduikers'", he stated, "happened sporadically. Uncle Willem and Aunt Dina anticipated that. Their personalities compelled them to be always quiet, friendly and doing what was good for us. At that time they knew better than us".

Jonny even talked about the Germans in forgiving terms, saying: "Ah", in a good natured manner, "often those boys could not do anything about that. They got their orders from the top".

About Willem and Dina –Jonny always called them 'Uncle Willem' and 'Aunt Dina' –never ceasing to talk about them, always addressing them in endearing terms. His words were loaded with empathy. Jonny continued: "Those two Lichtenvoorde people were laurelled with honesty and gratitude". Any praise to the modest Jonny Levy was quickly turned down. "The Geurink family deserves all the praise and honor".

In an intelligent manner, larded with roguish nature, again and again he turned the conversation in their direction. Willem and Dina were and stayed the subject of conversation during the whole afternoon visit.

Opposite from me, on that beautiful August afternoon, sat a man who in his later life, in an admirable way, had gone through and assimilated all emotions of his younger years as an 'onderduiker' well. Together with his wife, Dini (Davidson) Levy, an understanding woman, he has done well. Coincidentally, his wife, Dini, also was hidden underground during the war years.

Who, then, were Willem and Dina Geurink, actually? What moved them to take in strangers, people who were threatened with death at the risk of their own lives? Why did they always keep their mouths closed? Why? Actually we had to wait for more than fifty years to hear what took place around the yard of the Geurink family, in the last war years, to answer those interesting questions?

The answer was simple. These two people had that type [*of nature]. Their feeling of humaneness, justice, honor and unshakable confidence in a higher power, moved them to act; an automatism and an unconditional attitude aimed from a really inner realization of values and norms. They received a good part of this nature and morals from their individual homes, that is for sure. From the beginning they were taught to give as much as possible, both in material and immaterial matters. In this way, it was not surprising that Willem and Dina repeatedly said: "*We must be grateful to the Lord that we may and can do this work, and not those who were hiding there*".

At the request of the Levy family, the nomination committee of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, met together on January 29th, 1990, to consider a request to award Dina and Willem a high decoration for saving three Jewish 'onderduikers' with danger to their own lives. The request was unanimously approved. Three weeks later, on February 20th, 1990, this decision, which is described above, was confirmed by the directorate. On the fourteenth of May, 1990, the big day for the Geurink couple arrived. The Mayor of

Varsseveld, Mr. Hein Pannekoek, presented the promised Yad Vashem decoration to the couple. It's a medallion which includes a certificate of honor and a tree, which was planted for them on the Avenue of the Righteous at Yad Vashem on the Mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem.

Shortly after the death of Willem Geurink the farm was demolished. One by one the tiles were lifted from the roof and the window frames removed. The walls were 'respectfully' pushed over with little 'resistance'. A generous history was erased. Was it a pity? Was it good? Not good? Time will tell.

Dina Geurink, who survived her spouse by more than two years, reacted resigned to the fate of the farm. With much wisdom she stated:

"We have had our lives. Together, Willem and I, we have built up the farm, raised the children and sheltered a number of 'onderduikers'. We have had a good time, now it is done. After us other people come to take over the life and develop it to their views. So it must be. So it will be."

We end this monologue like we began. Nothing comes into an existence just like that. Everything has a cause and a purpose. The actions of the married couple, Willem and Dina (Wisselink) Geurink, started with a bad situation between 1940 and 1945 for certain communities. Their background provided the framework.

Willem and Dina, who were the personification of many of the Lichtenvoorde people, and, who, we repeat it again, acted with simplicity, courage and a strong feeling for justice, helped other people through a difficult period of history. Many of these folks are no longer with us. Such people have to be continually honored for many years.

While we – who surely intend for a well and happy future – will not forget the past

JUSTIFICATION

During the writing of this story, I have leaned strongly on Chapter 19 of the biography "*While We Never Forget, Memories of Willem Geurink and Dina (Wisselink) Geurink*", which was published in 1993 and given to members of the family circle. The reason I used this publication is simple: there was not any better documented and chronologically arranged material available.

Further I was supported by the family of (Geurink) Grevers from Winterswijk, the family of (Davidson) Levy from Deventer, the family of (Geurink) Rooiman from Enschede and the family of (Laning) Scholte from Lichtenvoorde. Moreover those before mentioned supplied me with valuable photos, copies and newspaper obits.

[*The writer] **Henny Bennink, February 11th, 2001.**

Notes [*from the writer].

1. The address of the Geurink family originally was: 'Derde Broekdijk, B 282 A'. In 1951 this was changed to 'Schievegatsdijk 12'. In the beginning of the sixties of the last century, this address and number was changed to 'Martin Lelivelstraat 82'. Now that part of the Martin Lelivelstraat, on which the farm was situated, is again called the 'Derde Broekdijk'. [Municipality Archives of Lichtenvoorde].
2. The 'Arbeitseinsatz': a German-Dutch construction organization. Goal: obliged employment of laborers in almost all sections of the German industry. Most of the laborers were employed in the war industry. In the Netherlands, the 'Arbeitseinsatz' was introduced in 1942, first reluctantly, later, after September 1944, radically. All men between 18 and 45 years were called up. [L.de Jong: *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, dl 4-8 (1972-1978); A.H. Paape e.a.: *Bericht van de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, dl 1-6 (1970-1971)].
3. The 'Nederlandse Arbeidsdienst (NAD)' [*A.G.: Literally translated 'The Dutch Employment Office'] was introduced on May 23rd, 1941 by the occupier. In principal all boys and girls, who had become the age of 18 years, had to perform their duties for that office. The duty for girls to participate was

never implemented. Jews were excluded from the cooperative. There was not much interest in the Netherlands for the 'Arbeidsdienst'. Because of this, beginning in 1942, the occupier called up complete year volumes. Second they ordered that everybody who aspired a public job or wanted to study, must first fulfill their 'Arbeidsdienst' duty. Even that measure could not raise the gusto for the indoctrinating, para-military organization. Another cause was the lack of camp space. [L. de Jong: Het Koninkrijk in de Tweede Wereldoorlog, dl 4-10 (1972-1981)].

4. Yad Vashem is an Israelitic foundation, which pays attention to those who made themselves deserving in the war by saving Jewish people. The institute bases their activities on Jesaja 56:5: *"I give them in my house and inside my walls a memorial and a name, better than my sons and daughters; I gave them an eternal name, which never will be exterminated"*. [Bijbel van het Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap, Amsterdam, 1966].

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